[Ex-WPA Workers]

January 11, 1939

Alfred and Clara Stamey (white)

628 South Church Street

Charlotte, N. C.

[Ex-WPA?] workers

Mary [R.?] Northrop, writer

[Names?] changed by [?]. [bjorkman?]

October 28, 1938

Dear Editor

Only six months to live. I was a WPA worker. so a few weeks ago I was pushing a heavy Wheelbarrow of rock down at the Swimming pool when suddenly Blood started coming out of my mouth and nose so I quit and come home and went to see Dr. Donnelly at the Health dept. he examined me and said I had T.B. so they wanted to get me in the Mecklenburg Sanatorium. there they also said I was a [victem?] of T.B. so I staid Four days at the Sanatorium and I got word that my wife was at home with nothing on earth to eat and no Job and no way to pay rent so that was More than I could stand and I got up and put on my clotes and Started to leave but the first person I met as I started to leave is the head doctor. I told him I was going home so he told me if I staid I had a hundred percent chance to Getting well but if I left I only had six months to live at the most. but the torcher of knowing my wife was at home Sufering for somthing to eat in a world of Plenty

was more than I could enDure so I went against my better Judgement and come home. C9 — N.C. Box 2.

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[M.D. 2?]

I found things just as I was told. at home my wife with nothing to eat and the landlady almost taking the Top off of the House because my wife could not Pay the Rent. Sunday morning I was standing in front of the post office and a Couple of federal men asked me how would I like to work a few minutes and I told Them just fine. so I help them carry several cases of liquor out [to?] the car. They took the liquor to the Insinerater and destroyed it. almost every time I made a step Blood come out of my Mouth. when the work was done they handed me a quarter. little did They realize just how much that little quarter meant to me. It meant that I could get a loaf of Bread and some beans for me and my little wife.

Before I left the Sanatorium the superntendant told me if I left under no circumstances could I ever get back in again. so for the love of my wife I am doomed to die a horrible death within six months for I have no money to take treatment with and only God in Heaven to Look to for mercy. I sure Am not going to condemn the local Welfare dept but I do think they should be more considerate to the realy desstitute. as long as there is a drop of blood left in my [Body?] I will try to see that my wife dont Sufer from cold and hunger.

as I am writing this Blood still pours from my lungs. If Some of the readers of [this?] have a single cent that they dont need it will be more than apreciated for I want to sleep out

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[N.C. 3?]

on the portch where I can get plenty of fresh air and Avoid giveing my wife the dreaded disease. I am not blaming Anyone for my misfortun. It is just a thing that is lible to happen to any one so God grant mercy until the end.

(signed) Arthur Manley

The letter was written legibly in pencil on coarse ruled tablet paper. The address given below the signature was a number on S. Church Street, which the editor knew to be in one of the most disreputable slum sections in town. He asked his associate editor to investigate the case, and I went along to see the Manleys.

In a telephone conversation with the Superintendent of the Sanatorium fifteen miles away, the doctor said he had caught Manley dressed and sneaking out, talked the man into going back to bed, got his promise not to leave, and found him missing next morning. The doctor also reported that Manley had not mentioned his wife as the cause of his wish to leave, that the man was a bad patient, restless and disobedient. There was rule of the hospital, he said, that patients who left before the doctor's dismissal—that is, before their cases became inactive—could not be re-admitted. He added that if Manley's story were true, the man could return to the Sanatorium.

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[N.C. 4?]

The associate [editor?] also called the County Welfare Association to ask why no food or money had been sent Mrs. Manley after her application for relief. There had been a mixup of some kind, the caseworker reported, but she did not know where. Mrs. Manley had been certified for a WPA job ten days before, she said, and also that it was a rule with the Welfare Agency to cut off food supplies upon certification for WPA work, but that food would be sent.

When we came to the [COO?] block we started looking at the house numbers. In most places none were shown. One house used to be notorious. All day there would be eight or ten girls sitting on the porch in the swing or in the rockers, talking and laughing and not doing any work. That day no one was in sight and there was a sign handprinted in soap on a windowpane, saying ROOMS FOR RENT. It was next door to the rooming-house where the Manleys lived.

The house is within seven blocks of Independence Square, center of the town. It has not known fresh paint for such a long time that you might think it had never been painted at all but for the fact that its construction and architectural style show the house to be of the type built for the well-to-do middle class about fifty years ago. There is a false balcony on the second story and a good deal of gingerbread trimming.

It is set almost flush with the ground. There is never a

blade of grass in the little front yard even in summer. The earth is hard-packed and some one who lives in the house keeps it swept as neatly as any floor. Perhaps it is the old woman who was shelling peas on the front porch. The part in her hair was a prim pink line.

Arthur was dressed and sprawled across the bannisters watching the old lady shell peas. He stood up to receive us and remained standing all the while we talked, nervously striking one pose after another. He could not keep still and his hands shook so that he had trouble lighting cigarettes. He wore denim pants and a faded khaki shirt open at the neck. It would have to be open. All the top buttons were missing. His breastbone was high and poked forward through his shirt. Almost through his skin, he was so thin. His nose was long and bony, and his chin and forehead sloped backwards. His head was small, too small, and

the hair on it was messy. His head was like a coconut covered with straggly coarse brown fibre.

He was not only willing but anxious to talk. Words spluttered out of his mouth. I thought of all the blood he wrote about and wondered what he would do if he had a hemorrhage then and there. He didn't have one.

“Yeah, this is me awright,” he said. “Yeah, I wrote that letter. I'll tell the worl' I'm not a-gonna let my wife starve to death. Not while I'm still a-livin' myself.

6

N.C. 6

“Laura, she wouldn'ta complained none herse'f but my cousin, he sent me a postcard, said she didn't have nothin' to eat, they was 'bout to put her out. I couldn't stand that. If when I'm down sick the 'thorities won't look out for her, then I can't be sick. No wife of mine's goin' hungry. I take care o' what's mine.

“Good thing I did thumb my way out o' there. Food come while ago. Not much. Some. She ain't had nothin' for a week but one little old sack of potatoes. Not even no grease to cook 'em in. There I was eatin' good—or pretty good, anyhow—and her hungry!”

He slapped his thighs in disgust.

“Y' understand, now, I didn't have no kick with the Sanatorium. They treat you pretty good. And I ain't got no kick with the Welfare. I reckon this to just how they do things. But I hope they don't do ever'body like this. The WPA too.”

“Can your wife sew?” I asked. “Maybe they'll put her on a sewing project when they have a place for her.”

“Oh, Laura, she's just a little thing. She can't do nothin'. She ain't never had to work. I always tooken care of her. I don't know what she can do. She's a mountain girl, not used to the town. Won't cross a street by herse'f. I hate her to have to go somewhere to work. We have married and livin' here three years but still she won't go nowheres by herse'f. I met her when I was a logger,” he grinned.

7

[N.C. 7?]

“Is that what you were before you got on WPA, a logger?” asked my companion.

“Me? Naw. I've done a little o' everything, but by callln' I'm rilly a truck driver. I've worked for Horton, Fredericks, Nicholson, Warren, don't know who-all. Got that way drivin' tractor on the farm.”

“Your farm?”

“Naw, I never had no farm. My old man, he farmed. Right here in this county. Farmed on shares. First job I ever had was on the farm. [Hoe?] hand. Twe've years old. Quit school in the six' grade to do it. Then I was a water boy.

“Got tired o' all that, though. I ain't crazy 'bout no farm. I done a lotta things. Worked in the copper mines over in Tinnissee. Didn't like that, either. Went to loggin' in the mountains. That's the kind o' work I like. Outdoors. Gimme air! Why I like truckin'. Some of my folks went in the mills, but not me. No, suh! “I'm thirty years old and ain't never had but one inside job. One time I's clerk in a grocery store. But I was hittin' it pretty hard then. I come in one day still drunk. Lady ast me for some or'nges and I give 'er potatoes. She told me they was potatoes, not or'nges, and I stood still and look around all over that store and didn't see no or'nges. Big pile of 'em right at me. I got fired. But I shoulda been. No kick there.”

[N.C. 8?]

“Had you [been?] hitting it much just before you got sick?”

“Naw. No money to hit it with. You can't hit it much on what WPA gives you. Not if You've got a wife.”

“Has any one else in your family ever had T.B.?”

“Naw, there's not one case history of T.B. in my family for several generations back. But as soon as Dr. Donnelly fluoroscoped me he seen I had it.”

Whatever else he might be, Manley was a good parrot. He did not stumble over fluoroscope.

“All that worries me is will Laura catch it,” he said.

“Does she seem well now?”

“Aw, just tol'able. Laura!” he called. “Come out chere!”

A shape loomed up in the gloom of the hall and Laura seemed to materialize behind the broken screen door. She hesitated a moment with her hand on the knob, looking at us, knowing she was being inspected.

“Come on out,” Manley said in a coaxing voice, as if speaking to a child. “This is the man from the paper.”

She [edged?] out and he caught her by the hand and pulled her forward.

“This is Laura,” he said, beaming.

She was twenty-eight, about five feet two, and must have weighed 140 pounds. Her ankles and wrists were thick and her stomach bulged. Her hair was brown and curly and would have been pretty if it had been clean. Beneath the frame of

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[N.C. 9?]

greasy ringlets her face was plain and dull. [Then?] she smiled uncertainly, we saw too [much?] of pale blue gum.

Over one eye there was an ugly scar. Manley called our attention to it.

“Se that? She's got a hundred and fifty like it.”

He lifted the hem of her dress, pulled down a stocking, and showed us another bad one on her knee.

“Her mama give 'em to her,” he said. “That's how come I married her, to get her away from all that.”

He grinned proudly and Laura smiled.

“Did your mother beat you?”

“Cut me and beat me both,” she answered placidly.

“What did you do?”

“Nothin'.”

“You didn't hit back?”

“Naw, I never.”

“You just took it?”

“Yeah, I guess so.”

“Well, why did she do it?”

“Aw, it was Peter.”

“Peter?”

Manley interrupted.

“He's her stepfather,” he said.

Laura showed a little animation.

“He's not my stepfather,” she said. “He's not no stepfather o' mine.”

10

[N.C. 10?]

Manley's smile was the smile of a proud uncle showing off a three-year old to company. He and [we?], it said, knew that she was cute and smart for her age, and wasn't she funny?

“Yes, he is your stepfather,” he said. “He married your mamma.”

Laura pulled herself together and showed understanding. She made a little sound of embarrassment and looked ashamed.

“Yeah, I [reckon?] he is, but I don't want to claim him.”

“Did he treat you badly too?”

“Aw, just words. He never hit me.”

“Then why did she treat you badly because of him?”

“Aw, I don' know. But after she married him she turned into a devil.”

“Did she and Peter have any children?”

“Lots. She liked 'em better than she did me and Jerry, my real brother. I got out quick's I could.”

Manley took up the story.

“She lived in the County Home a while. After while she had to leave there and didn't have no place to go but back home, so that's why I married her. To look out for her. I've always tooken care of her, too, till now. Three years.”

“Have you any children?”

They looked at each other and a queer expression came over Laura's face.

11

N.C. 11

“Naw, we ain't,” he said. He went on at length over how much he thanked god for that, with things what they were, and began to ramble.

I asked Laura if she would step over to the end of the porch. It was obvious, but I knew she would not talk before my companion.

“When you were asked if you-all had any children, I noticed you smiled, Mrs. Manley. What about it?” I grinned at her, feeling ashamed. I need not have.

“Aw, no, I'm not thataway atall. I ain't seen nothin' in three-four months, but I know I ain't thataway. I'd know. And I know I ain't.”

“Are you sure?” I went on, looking down the ugly street. “Because there's a maternity clinic here with doctors to take care of you—you and the baby both. I could take you there if you're scared to cross the street. They have a delivery room right there.”

“Aw, I tell you, lady, you think my big stomach's that, but it ain't. Don't you worry. You know what it is? It's a tumor. I had my appendick out, and they tell me when you have your appendick out you lotsa times gets a tumor. That's what it is. Just a tumor.”

She was plainly-relieved that it was only a tumor.

We made ready to leave.

12

N.C. 12

Manley put his arm around Laura and looked down at her upturned face.

“I sure am glad my brother wrote me what fix she's in, he said.

We both remembered that he had said his cousin wrote, but neither of us said anything.

It was a sociable farewell.

I thought that perhaps the reason Laura had not been given a WPA job was that the caseworkers might have suspected pregnancy. If that were the case, they would have referred her back to the County Welfare for some form of direct relief.

Laura's card in the WPA files showed that she and Arthur had two infant children, Effie and Lucy. The two babies were the reason she had not been given a job, the caseworker said.

Destitute women who have been married, widowed, divorced, or are without a husband for any other reason, and who are mothers of young children, are given a monthly sum for the support of each child, so that they may be able to stay at home and attend the children rather than be forced to go out to earn their living. It is called Aid to Dependent Children. The caseworker had held up Laura's job to check up on the case with the Welfare Agency and try to get that aid rather than WPA work, so that she might be able to take care of Effie, aged 2, and Lucy, aged 11 months, at home.

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N.C. 13

“They told me they had no children,” I said.

The caseworker looked grim and called the County Welfare.

My companion also called the County Welfare and an investigation was begun.

There were indeed two children, but they were Arthur's not Laura's. Their mother was a woman named Bessie Rupper, who had been arrested countless times for drunkenness and prostitution. She had disappeared some time before, presumably taking the two little girls with her, for they too had disappeared. No one at any of her old addresses knew where they had gone.

Arthur's attempt to get more relief money for Laura by means of his illegitimate children had been the cause of delay in getting either direct relief or a job. He had not known about Aid to Dependent Children.

His letter was published in the Letters-to-the Editor column of the newspaper with a brief report on him and Laura, showing both their and the Welfare Agency's side of the problem, unbiassed in both cases. The children were mentioned only as “possibly by a former marriage.” In it was told Laura's story of her scars and Arthur's previous

contradictory statement to the Welfare worker that she had been brought up from infancy in a Tennessee orphanage. Three days later the editor received another letter from Arthur. Things were not moving fast enough to suit him.

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N.C. 14

“Dear Editor,” it read. “I wrote a pice and put in the paper a few days ago about me leaving the T.B. Sanatorium because my wife was at Home on Starvation. it seems as Though the Circumstances are not any better yet for I am at Home with a Chronic Cold and two abcest teeth and a High fever Caused by a Cold and t.B. combined. The Doctor said He would reconsider taking me back in the Sanatorium the first Vacancy He Had.

“last Wednesday morning the Case worker Came to my House and gave my wife what they Call the Commodity order which is a order to go to the old Jail on mint St. and git Commoditys which is a federal Surpulus Supply sent here for the needy So me and my wife took the order and went to the old Jail and got in line at nine o'clock in the morning so after staying in line until one 1clock finaly got our order filled which Consisted of a 12 1/2 pound bag of flour and Half bushel of apples two Pounds of butter two messes of prunes. they tell me that they give different things each issue day which is twice a month. they told my wife to Come back the 11th of nov. so the butter and prunes Have already exHausted only apples and flour left. no oil to cook the bread with or grease to put in it. and me very sick.

“so when it comes breakfast time I get me a raw apple and eat it and at twelve I do the same thing and also at supper time. oh But I was about to forget the old saying apple a day keeps the Doctor away. But three apples a day given by the Government will keep the welfare away. The Case worker said

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N.C. 15

that some ten days ago my wife was Certified to the WPA and then the regular order was stopped if they ever was started was more than I ever knew of. my wife Hasent got her notice to go to work yet. After she starts to work she will Have to work two weeks before her time is sent off then it will be another week before the Check Can get back from Raleigh.

“one thing the lord has blessed us with that is it Has been nice and warm. if it Had been cold we would of done and froze for we dont Have any fuel to make a fire with. it has been over a month now since I Had to quit work on the account of Having T.B. When I first found out I had T.B. the Health Department notified the welfare and told them all about my Condition and that I would Have to Have help so they promised to send a food order but I never did got it. Of Course there is Plenty of acorns in our yard Probably they think I am kin to the Squirrell generation.

“if any one doubts my statement they are more than welcome to Come and see for themselves I live or rather exist at 000 South Church St. Proof of the trueness of any statement that I Have made to the press or welfare Dept will be furnished upon request.

“I would of been in the Sanatorium [this?] day taking treatment like I should if the welfare would of did as they promised. they Promised to look after my wife until she Could get to

work and draw her first Check. Promises was all that it was though for they sure did not do anything for her that is why I left the Sanatorium. Can you imagine the agony I am suffering knowing that my wife Has to go to bed with out anything to eat. And I am not able to do a thing about it either for this Chronic Cold and T B combined Has got me where I have to stay in bed.

“But I cant rest I am failing fast. I feel like I Have lost several pounds in the last week. Well as it is getting late I think I will eat another apple and call it supper and try to go to sleep.”

(Signed) Arthur Manley

000 S. Church St.

Charlotte, N. C.

Calls to the County Welfare and the WPA revealed that Arthur had been taken back to the Sanatorium that day and that Laura had been assigned to a WPA sewing project.

About a week later Arthur started a fire at the Sanatorium by throwing a cigarette into a wastebasket when he heard a nurse's footsteps. Paper blazed up and the flame caught a curtain. The nurse put out the fire, but Arthur came close to being sent home from the hospital. He had become so conceited over having letters published in a newspaper and so cocky over the publicity that he was almost unmanageable.

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[N.C. 17?]

Laura was making about $36 a month on WPA, piecing quilts for the poor. She worked six weeks and then the project was closed. December 16 she was out of a job.

Two days after Christmas I went to her house. The thumb-twist bell was broken, but someone had tacked a clean piece of Nottingham lace across the inside of the glass half of the door. Winged cupids flew through the net above a scalloped sea. There was a pink bench on the porch with a plush-covered automobile seat across it.

An old woman answered the knock and beckoned without a word. She hunched down the hall with an economy of motion that suggested she might be in great pain. I stopped at the last door but she looked me on.

Laura's room was off the book porch. Another old woman came out as I was about to go in. She wore a dirty mobcap. Her face and clothes were dirty. Her dirty hair stuck out in strands with corrugated ends, remains of an old, cheap permanent. She looked a thousand years old.

Inside the room Laura and still another old woman set around a small red-hot stove. This old woman was clean as a new kettle. The room was stifling with hot stale air, but she was wrapped in a coat.

“Yeah, sure I know you,” Laura said, smiling. “You're the one come with the man. Say, you know that tumor I had? Well, it's a-kickin' and jumpin' around. Five months.

18

N.C. 18

“No. I ain't been to the clinic. I ain't felt good enough to. I wrote a letter this morning to the caseworker and told her 'bout the baby, but I'm so nervous and jumpy I'm 'fred somep'n might happen 'fore she can get here.”

She had gained about twenty pounds and the seams of her print dress had burst almost from the knee to the armpits. Her ankles were badly swollen, her eyes were darkly sunken. The ringlets had straightened out and were hanging lank against her head. But she seemed to be more alive than before.

“Why, Arthur, he's doin' all right,” she said. “I's scared to tell him about me losin' my job, fear he might run off again. But he said they'd take care of me after the way he come home last time.

“Le's see, I still got 'bout six dollars. Granny—that's this lady here—she says I can stay here in her room till the relief starts, and then too, if I want, so she can take care of me. Arthur said he thought I better, but I don't know. Granny's near eighty. I'd hate her to have to get up in the night if my time comes. Them Welfare people oughta give me 'nough money to go somewheres a strong person could take care of me.”

She looked at me questioningly, hesitantly, and finally made up her mind.

19

[N.C. 19?]

“Looka here,” she said. “I ain't well atall. The caseworker won't get my letter till in the mornin' and I'm nervous. I want her now and it's awmost time for the place to close. Will you go call her up and tell her to come now? Tell her to hurry up and come right now!”

It was a command, not to me, but to the caseworker.

After five minutes in that room, fresh cold air would be welcome, so though I did not believe Laura was in urgent need of attention, I hurried out.

The publicity Arthur's case had brought was resented by the Welfare Agency. The caseworker was disgusted to hear of Laura's pregnancy.

“Oh! Lord!” she said. “Well, if she's only five months she can wait till Monday.”

A week later Laura said the caseworker had never come. She was scornful of the woman for being snide and tricky.

“And that other one said they'd give me relief.”

This was an indictment of the one who was not “the other one,” and who possibly would not have told her, for all she knew.

“Said I had to have it and they'd hafta give it to me.”

“Then another one came to see you?”

“Naw. Looked like she wasn't comin' so I went there. She wasn't there. Granny took me. I oughtn't to have to go out big like [this?].”

20

N.C. 20

Granny spoke up.

“Them people!' she said, shaking her head.

Laura smiled at the old woman.

“I hope they start it soon,” she said. “Here I am a-living' on Granny, and they don't give her only $13 a month.”

“Yes'm, I gets the pension, too, ma'am,” Granny said. Ever'body in this house gets it. All seven of 'em. They's all real old people like me that can't do no work and ain't got no children to do for 'em. Except Miz Allenson. She sews around some, so they don't give her but $10. She's got two rooms. She manages the house, too.

“Yeah, she makes a little,” Laura said.

Both voices held respect with the overtones of fear. Arthur's first letter had said: ”...and the landlady taking the top off the house because my wife could not pay the rent.”

“When I got it I'll made eight,” Laura said gaily. “Then I'll he'p buy coal. You can see we ain't got as warm a fire's we had last time. That's 'cause the coal's low and its most a week till Granny's check comes. When I get mine I'll be able to get food for both of us and pay

her back some. I can he'p with the rent. Seems like a dollar a week's/ a awful lot to pay for one little old room."

"Not no nice room, neither," Granny mumbled.

"[Scuse / me?] a minute, will you?" Laura said suddenly. She went into the alcove which formerly must have been the kitchen closet and when she came out she smelled to heaven of perfume.

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N.C. 21

"When Arthur was not present Laura was not speechless and timid.

"Look at it," she said, waving her hand. "I don't mean I ain't lucky to be livin' here with Granny, but ain't it different from the mounting tops where I come from!"

A little stove in a [corner?]; a broken dirty window with a view of the side of the house with Rooms for Runt; two double beds, the metal one by the window neatly made and covered with a clean green quilt, and the other, [Gothic?] in walnut, holding a [spraddle?] of soiled clothes and bed covers; a porch rocker set on top of a flat tin trunk painted green; a wall sink; a two-plate oil stove on a table; three kitchen chairs and a wooden box; the alcove with another dirty window looking at the backs of Negro houses, and shelves full of boxes and junk. All that in a room perhaps 12 x 14 feet.

"Course I'll tell you 'bout me," Laura said. "Taint nothing to write no story 'bout, though.

"I was born in Ducktown, Tinnissee, right on the top of a mounting and only 'bout four miles from Murphy, over here in this State. That's the place I had my trouble.

"My name was Laura May Jones. So now I'm Laura May Jones Manley, and ain't that a name? 'Bout as long's my own father's. He was George Henry Jefferson Jones. He'd be

over a hundred years old now if he was a-livin'. That ain't so funny, though. He was fifty-five when he married and me and Jerry come late.

22

[N.C. 22?]

“Mamma's people come up there [from?] [Georgia?]—I don't know why. Her name was Carrie. Carrie Lou. Carrie Lou Wilson. She was a whole lot younger'n him. He was workin' then at—somep'n—somep'n funny. Kind of like a mine, yet not. In the ground, like a mine, yet not deep in the ground. I know! A whorry. He worked in the rock whorry.

“So they got married. When I was five years old he died. So Mamma moved over to Murphy and kep' a boardin' house for loggers. I can't remember much but the cold winters. She didn't treat me so bad then, and I went to school to the fi'th grade.

“Then she married with Peter. Peter Moss, he was. He was not no logger. He'd been workin' in the copper mines in Tinnissee but his uncle left him a farm, so he come home.

“Well, from time first one come, she started in on me. Jerry, my real brother, was 'bout grown—he was older'n me—so he lit out. Just couldn't stand her or him neither. I ain't heard of him sence. Don't seem like now I never had no brother.

“So there wasn't nobody to take up for me. My law. Look like ever'thing that made her mad she'd take it out on me. Stick o' stovewood, poker, meat ax, butcher knife, shoe, skillet, or just plain hand—she just had to hurt me somehow. Wasn't a day in them ten years I wasn't full o' scabs and sores and cuts and bruises.

23

[N.C. 23?]

“It seem like I didn't have no sense about it. She'd haul off and th'ow [somep'n?] at me or [clout?] me over the head and I'd just stand there and wouldn't do nothin'. Look like that

made her all the madder, but I never could do nothin', somehow. I'd be there yet—if she wouldn'ta kilt me—if it hadn't been for Miz [Moss?].

“She was Peter's aunt. She come to me one day and said she'd written to the County 'thorities 'bout the way Mamma was treatin' me.

“Law, if they didn't have a big trial! They put me up there on the stand for a hour and a half. I showed 'em all the scars I could without it bein' bad. The judge ast me a whole lot o' questions. Then Mamma they put her on the stand. He ast her why she done it and she said it was 'cause I kicked the little'ns and tried to kill 'em. That's the onliest time I ever called anybody a lie. I jumped up and butted right in and hollered at her, 'You're just a lie! I never done that.'

“The judge said, 'Laura, did you do that?' I said 'No, suh, course not,' and he said 'I thought not.' So he give her two years in the workhouse or $200 fine.

“Peter paid it out, so she never went. Peter had money. The farm was pretty good size—four big bottoms and two hillsides. He had a orchard. Apples mostly, and some peaches, but not no or'nges or bananas.

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[N.C. 24?]

“I couldn't go back to Peter's after that on the judge said I better go out to the Cherokee County Home. I done that and worked for my keep two years, washin' clothes for the old people and washin' dishes and cleanin' up.

“Well, I couldn't stay there the rest of my life—County Home's for old folks—so I got out and went to work tendin' little kids for people. Went over to Andrews, 'bout twe've mile from Murphy, and done that. That's where I got sick. Just fell over one day in the awfullest hurtin' you ever seen.

“They took me to the hospital in [Sylva?] and took out my appendick. I was awful sick. Look like I didn't have the will to get well. Course I couldn't work, so they sent me back to the County Home. I was a reg'lar inmate 'bout three months. Didn't raise my hand.

“Then I got my nervous breakdown. I was awful nervous and kinda jumped around. Sometime I'd go kinda stiff. Then I'd get to cryin' and couldn't quit. They said it mighta been on account o' how Mamma done me, but I don't know. They sent me to the State Hospital at Morganton. I was there six years. Law, there was some o' the craziest people there I ever seen.

“I kep' writin' Arthur—Yeah, I'd met him back in Murphy and we'd got engaged—to go on and get him another girl if one come along, but he never. At least—“ spasm of feeling

crossed her face—“at least I'm the one he married. Him and and his sister come and got me last January. The twenty-fi'th, it was. He lived here in Charlotte with her then so we come on down here and the next day we got married. January the twenty-six', 1938. I'll never forget that. I can't recall the name o' the preacher, but It was at the—the—the [Wetheld's?] Metheldis Church. Whew! that was a mouthful, but I got it out!”

Arthur had told us that they had been married three years and that she had never had to work.

“The rest ain't nothin'. Sence then—well, we just been livin'. That's all you can say. So you see it ain't nothin' to make a story.”

It was easy to see why Arthur had lied to the caseworker about Laura having been brought up in a Tennessee orphanage. Though she looked lumpish and placid, her foot kept tapping and she shifted about continually.

“I ain't as nervous as I was when I went to Morganton,” she said. “But I sure do get real nervous sometimes. That's why I wanted that caseworker so bad. Well, I went to the clinic the other day, but it was Nigger Day so they told me to come back Tuesday. They'll tell me if I'm all right. I guess I am. Arthur's doin' fine now so that makes me feel better.”

She went with me through the doorway and we stood at the top of the back steps. There was nothing to look at but a

stretch of tin cans and stubble that was bounded on the other side by six Negro shacks.

“Ain't pretty, is it,” she said. 'Looks like there's only the one outhouse to those six houses but if you stretch around thataway you can see another one belongs to that three there. I don't have much to do but look out the back window at them niggers, and I never seen none of 'em go in that'n we can see 'cept ones [in?] the other three houses.”

There was no boredom or complaint in her tone that she had no better entertainment than watching her black neighbors.

An adolescent girl with a sly idiot face came around the house and stood at the foot of the steps staring at us.

“Hello, Jenny,” Laura said kindly. “You run on and come back again some other time.”

Jenny sidled off still staring over her shoulder.

“She ain't right bright,” Laura said apologetically. As she spoke, a beautiful and filthy little boy jumped out from under the steps.

“Boo, Mammy, boo!” he shouted. “I was under dere all d' time!”

“Hey, Timmy boy, hey! You was a-hidin' from me! You hadn't oughta hide from Mammy!”

“I was des playin',” he laughed. “BOO-oo-oo-oo-ooh!” He galloped off.

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[N.C. 27?]

“Course I'd give a thousand dollars if this [baby?] hadn'ta happened,” Laura said, “But sence it has—well, I kinda like kids. You know that six dollars I had? Well, I went out and got me a little pink blanket and a little blue blanket and some little shirts and belly-bands and things. Law, the little thing's got to have somep'n. ”

A small girl about seven peeped around the corner of the house. A dingy uncovered bed pillow was balanced on her head.

“I heard your voice,” she said flirtatiously.

Laura pointed at the pillow derisively.

“Law me, Miss Smith, do tell where you got your new hat!”

Miss Smith delicately raised a hand and put the other where a hip would one day be. She took a few mincing steps and then switched a pert behind.

“Why, Miz Manley, I just paid a hundred dollars for it at the store!”

Laura and the little girl throw up their hands and shouted in delighted, contemporary laughter.